

AN APPROACH TO THE NOMINAL PREDICATES IN ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN¹

Abstract: The paper is meant to be an approach to the use of nominal predicates in English and Romanian. In English there are two kinds of nominal predicates: the nominal predicate proper, concerned with the state or quality of the subject, and the double/complex predicate, which is a rather widespread form in English.

In Romanian nominal predicates can be split into two categories: the proper nominal predicate, made up of a predicative and the copula “a fi” and the verbal nominal predicate, made up of a predicative and a lexical and grammatical copula. The predicative achievement within the nominal predicate structure is often similar to the subject achievement.

Key words: predicative, nominal predicate proper, copula, predicative syntagm, predicative achievement

Résumé: L'objectif de cet article est de mettre en contraste les prédicats nominaux en anglais et roumain. En anglais il existe deux types de prédicat nominal: le prédicat nominal propre portant sur l'état ou la qualité de l'objet, et le prédicat double/complexe, qui est une forme assez répandue en anglais.

En roumain, il existe deux catégories de prédicats nominaux: le prédicat nominal propre, formé d'un attribut du sujet et la copule *être* et le prédicat nominal verbal, constitué d'un attribut du sujet et une copule lexicale ou grammaticale. Le rôle de l'attribut du sujet dans le cadre du prédicat nominal est similaire à celui du sujet.

Mots-clés: attribut du sujet, prédicat nominal propre, copule, syntagme prédicatif, rôle prédicatif

The predicate is the principal part of the sentence which shows what the subject does, what the subject is or what the subject is like. In English the classification of predicates is made first according to the criterion of content and then according to the criterion of composition. So, we can identify: *verbal predicates*, *nominal predicates*, and *mixed types of predicates*.

1. Nominal Predicates. The Nominal Predicate Proper

The nominal predicate proper shows the state or quality of the subject or the evolution of this state or quality.

The nominal predicate proper is made up of a *linking verb* and a *predicative*:
George was ready to talk; it was only time that seemed to be wanting.

The *linking verbs* or *copulas* (sometimes called semi-auxiliaries because they discharge a grammatical function, either having a little meaning of their own or without contributing essentially to the meaning of the predicate) are all intransitive verbs. They take upon themselves the task of indicating the morphological categories of the verb, therefore

¹ Nicoleta Florina Mincă, University of Pitești, nico.minca@yahoo.com.

the formal elements of the predicate: aspect, voice, mood, tense, person and number. The meaning of the predicate is generally expressed by the *predicative*.

There are several categories of semi-auxiliary verbs which can be used as linking verbs:

- Verbs of *being* or *state* – like: *to be, to stand, to feel*;

The ground *was wet* with dew.

The meeting *stands adjourned*.

Betty *was a very shy girl*.

- Verbs of *remaining* or *continuing* – like: *to continue, to keep, to remain, to hold*,

to stay:

The weather still *continues fine*.

The boy *remained deeply amazed*.

The rule still *holds good*.

- Verbs of *becoming* or of *transition* from one state to another – the most numerous category of linking verbs like: *to become, to get, to grow, to turn, to fall, to run, to go, to prove, to turn out*:

This river *runs dry* in summer.

They all *get upset* at times.

The mountains chain *grew visible*.

The leaves *were turning red and brown*.

The children were whispering together before they *fell asleep*.

This thing may *turn out rotten*.

- Verbs of *seeming* or *appearing*, that retain a certain modal force – like: *to seem, to appear, to look*;

He *looked aged and bent*, and quite *bowed down*.

She *appeared vexed*.

Yet he *looked a wiser man* than in the days he wanted nothing but facts.

A certain variety can also be found among *predicatives* which may be expressed by various parts of speech in the sphere of nomina:

- a *noun* in the nominative or genitive:

She is a *teacher*.

The dictionary is *Jane's*.

It is my *brother's*.

- *predicative adjectives*:

It is *nice* of you to have come.

Her face is *aglow*.

- *personal, possessive, indefinite or interrogative pronouns*:

This house is *theirs*.

Who's there? It's *me*.

What are the wages of crime?

- a *noun, a gerund or pronoun accompanied by a preposition*:

Her son looked *like her*.

The girl looked *in perfect health*.

- a *cardinal or an ordinal numeral*:

We were *nine*.

He is *the third*.

- An *infinitive or infinitival phrase*:

To be or not to be, that is the question.

• a gerundial phrase:

His hobby is *hunting the second-hand bookshops*.

• a predicative clause:

What are you telling me is *exactly what I had expected*.

The truth is *I don't like it at all*.

2. Nominal predicates. The Double / Complex Predicate

The double predicate is a rather widespread form in English which hardly finds proper equivalents in other languages. The prototype can be the famous sentence “*The moon rose red*” which shows that in fact, in a double predicate we have to do with the contraction of the predicates of two sentences and clauses, easily to be reconstituted (*The moon was red when it rose*, or *The moon rose. It was red*.).

The cords of his neck *stood out hard and lean*.

The general meaning of this type of predicate is that a nominal predicate of being, at other times it is one of becoming, of appearing, of remaining, etc:

The sun *came out hot*.

The ground *rode soft* that morning.

The tents *lay silent* in the moonlight.

That house *has long stood empty*.

In the second example the interpretation is rather controversial, some authors favouring the conception of “predicative adjunct”. The interpretation is either that in this case the verb *to ride* functions almost like a linking verb (as in the *Moon rose red*):

I rode that morning. The ground was soft; or

The ground was soft / I felt the ground soft when I rode that morning; or

Riding that morning, I felt the ground (to be) soft (under the hoofs of my house).

3. Nominal Predicates in Romanian

The most widely-used linking verb in Romanian is the verb “*a fi*”. There is a difference between the verb *a fi* and the other linking verbs which add a semantic characteristic to the nominal predicates structure:

Marcu *părea fratele* mai mare; nenea Ghiță *era fratele* mic.

In the first sentence, the subject function of characterization is discharged by the whole predicative syntagm – *părea fratele*; the verb *părea* brings to the predicative syntagm the sign *Appearance*: *Părea fratele*, but *nu era fratele*. In the second sentence, the linking verb *era* identifies the subject by the predicative *fratele*. If we changed the places of the two verbs, we would also change the meaning of our communication. The other linking verbs can not be replaced by the verb *a fi* without changing the content.

There are two categories of nominal predicates in Romanian:

- a. *the proper nominal predicate*, which is made up of *a predicative* and *the copula a fi*;
- b. *the verbal nominal predicate*, which is made up of *a predicative* and *a lexical and grammatical copula*.

Some predicative syntagms are built *in absentia*, without the copula *a fi*. In such cases the verbal element is omitted, so the statement becomes a nominal sentence: Fețioara

lui, / *Spuma* laptelui; / *Mustăcioara* lui, / *Spicul* grâului; / *Perișorul* lui, / *Pana* corbului; / *Ochișorii* lui, / *Mura* câmpului.

The verbal nominal predicate is made up of a predicative preceded or followed by a lexical and grammatical copula and can signify:

- permanence: *Sunt de subătăiată Buzăului, mă cheamă Radu Suliță și am fost ucenic la episcopie; Hanul lui Haramin se află așezat la o răspantie de drumuri;*
- quality keeping: *Tot obraznic ai rămas, nene Iancule!; Poporul se păstra cu indărjire liber; Când trece pe langă nuc, îl pușnește râsul, dar se ține serios;*
- equivalence: “*Bunar” înseamnă în limba nohailor fântană; O poliță iscalită în alb, vrea să zică o foaie de astea în care un găgăuță ca domnul Mihai își iscălește numele fără să puie suma ce a primit; Tu să nu te mai numești prieten al meu;*
- assumption: *Dacă însă acum Nuțu îmi părea mie grozav de prost, eu îi păream lui grozav de înțeles; Arați tare și voinic ca un urs!; Razașul s-a arătat mirat de povestirea monahului;*
- obtaining of a quality: *Am fost oștean cu leașă la Domnia Moldovei și am ajuns în vremea lui Ion Vodă diac la logofăția cea mare; Nu se face astă ofițer, cum nu mă fac eu popă!; Nedelcu s-a ales un pungă de rând.*

4. The Nominal Achievement of the Predicative

The predicative achievement within the nominal predicate structure is similar to the subject achievement, because the class units of the predicative are very much alike to those of the subject. The parallelism between the two classes can be noticed starting with the basis scheme of a *subject – nominal predicate relationship* and ending with some aspects of detail: if the subject is achieved by an infinitive, the predicative is usually an infinitive, too:

A susține aceasta idee înseamnă *a lupta* pentru ea.

Indeed, if the subject and the predicative have the same structure as in the example above, the similarity can not be absolute, so there must be a minimum difference that should ensure the co-occurrence of the two units in the same relation scheme. The difference can also be expressed by other elements of structure. Thus the predicative may be simple or complex, but unlike the subject it is always obvious.

- The nominal achieving of the predicative has the following aspects:
 - A noun in the nominative, if determined by expansion: *Ion este inginer; Maria este economista întreprinderii.*
 - If the predicative number and person are different from those of the subject, the usual function of the agreement redundancy imposes the order of the structure - *subject – nominal predicate*: *Noi suntem colectivul; Voi sunteți echipa; Noi suntem poporul.*
 - The achieving of the predicative by a personal pronoun imposes the copula a person and number agreement: *Eu sunt profesor; Profesorul ești tu; El este profesor.*
 - The predicative achieving by a noun in the genitive which is determined by *al* linked with the a possessive pronoun: *al meu, al tău: Caietul este al lui Paul; Hainele rămân ale tale; Pălăria pare a Mariei.*
 - The achieving by an adjective or a numeral in the nominative: *Fata este frumoasă și cuminte; Fiul meu este al treilea.*
 - A prepositional nominal syntagm achieving: *Noi suntem împotriva propunerii; Ion este dintre cei mijlocii.*

- The achieving by a nominal form of the verb: *Unul dintre scopurile noastre este de a combate lipsurile; Calmul lui este de invidiat.*
- The achieving by the adverbs which are co-occurrent with a subject expressed by an infinitive, a *supin* or a subjective clause: *A planui este mai simplu decat a îndeplini planul; Este imposibil de oprit apa.*
- The achieving by a prepositional predicative, which is introduced by relative pronouns or adverbs or by the conjunctions: *să, că, dacă: Aceasta nu este cine crezi tu; Întrebarea este ce mânăcăm azi; Problema este dacă îl mai ajungem sau nu; Dacă intărzi înseamnă că nu vei intra în sală.*

5. Conclusions

In English the nominal predicate proper shows the state or quality of the subject or the evolution of this state or quality. It is made up of a linking verb (copula) and a predicative. The copulas discharge a grammatical function, either having a little meaning of their own or not, and they are intransitive verbs. They indicate the morphological categories of the verb. The meaning of the predicate is generally expressed by the predicative.

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The most widely-used linking verb in Romanian is the verb “*a fi*”. There is a difference between the verb *a fi* and the other copulas which add a semantic characteristic to the nominal predicates structure. There are two kinds of nominal predicates in Romanian: the proper nominal predicate, made up of a predicative and the copula *a fi* and the verbal nominal predicate, made up of a predicative and a lexical and grammatical copula.

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Nicoleta Florina MINCĂ is a lecturer at the Department of Applied Foreign Languages, Faculty of Theology, Letters, History and Arts, University of Pitești. She has been teaching English as a foreign language for twenty four years and held a Doctor's degree in Philology in 2008, at "Lucian Blaga" University, in Sibiu. Her area of interest includes applied linguistics, translation, and English for Specific Purposes. She is the author of several English practical courses in Economics and Law such as: *English for Business*, *Economic Matters in English*, *English for Students in Law*, *Business English*. She also published a number of papers and articles focused on linguistics, didactics, ESP, English literature.